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cross, the knots, and letters of an extremely early Christian period—all of them much older than the date of the first authenticated descent of *lettered* Northmen upon the shores of Ireland.

XXIX.—ON ROCK CARVINGS. By HODDER M. WESTROPP.

[Read May 11, 1868.]

THE presence of carvings on rocks, stones, monoliths, cromlechs, and other megalithic structures in many countries, bearing a remarkable analogy and likeness to one another, has justly excited much wonder and speculation. Sir James Simpson has published a very careful and accurate account of the sculpturings of cups and concentric rings in various parts of Scotland, accompanied by excellent illustrations; Mr. Tate has published those discovered in Northumberland; Mr. Du Noyer has also written some interesting papers on the rock carvings found in Ireland. In Brittany the blocks used in the construction of the gallery and chamber of the great sepulchral mound at Gaor Inis, in the Morbihan, are densely covered with continuous circular, spiral, zigzag, looped, and various other types of carving. The stones of the tumuli and cromlechs at Loc Mariaker present figures of various military weapons and arms, with some imperfect figures of animals.

Analogous carvings of circles and very rude sketches of ships (rather canoes) and crews have been found on rocks and cromlechs in Scandinavia.

Rude representations of animals, with inscriptions, occur on rocks near Mount Sinai, which have been attributed to wandering pastoral tribes.

Humboldt mentions rocks covered with sculptured figures in several parts of South America. He thus notices some on the Orinoco:—"We were shown near the rock Culimacari, on the banks of the Cassiquiare, and at the port of Caycara, in the Lower Orinoco, traces which were believed to be regular characters. They were, however, only misshapen figures representing the heavenly bodies, together with tigers, crocodiles, boas, and instruments used for making the flour of Capsava. It was impossible to recognize in these painted rocks (*piedras pintados*), the name by which the natives denote those masses loaded with figures), any symmetrical arrangement or characters with regular spaces.

Mr. Squiers has discovered analogous carved rocks at Masaya, in Nicaragua, and Mr. Bollaert notices several in different parts of South America.

At the Cape the caves inhabited by the Bushmen, one of the rudest races of humanity, are frequently found painted with the representations of the animals of the neighbourhood, and sometimes with battle and hunting scenes.

Various have been the conjectures with regard to the origin of these

sculptures, the age at which they were carved, and the race of men who carved them.

Professor Nilsson attributes those found in Scandinavia to Phœnician origin, and considers the circles as symbols of the sun and other heavenly bodies—a most untenable hypothesis, as there exist no similar carvings among Phœnician remains to connect them with. Further, analogous and identical circles and carvings are found in America and other countries where no Phœnician influence could possibly have reached. Others suggest that they are symbols, or symbolic enumerations of families and tribes, or some variety of archaic writing or philosophical emblems.

We shall, I think, be led to a more just conclusion as to their origin if we bring before our mind that man, in his rude, early, and primitive age, bears a great analogy in his actions and thoughts to those of a child. The savage and primitive man has the same fondness for imitation, the same love of laborious idleness as the child. A child will pass hours whittling and paring a stick, building a diminutive house or wall, and tracing forms on the turf. The savage will wear away years in carving his war club and polishing his stone adze. These considerations lead me to attribute these carvings and sculpture to the laborious idleness of a pastoral people, passing the long and weary day in tending their flocks and herds; they amused themselves by carving and cutting those various figures of the sun, the moon, or any animals or objects in their neighbourhood, on the rocks near them. For, as Sir James Simpson remarks, man has been in all ages “a sculpturing and a painting animal.”

These rude outlines by primitive men, in various countries, like the rude attempts at drawing by children, cannot but bear a family resemblance to one another, their utter absence of art being frequently their chief point of relationship.

These views may seem absurd, but they have the sanction of a high authority. Humboldt, when noticing the sculptured rocks in South America, considers these figures, “instead of being symbolical, rather as the fruits of the idleness of hunting nations.” As some would recognize alphabetic characters in these carvings, he observes further (Cordilleras, I., 154):—“We cannot be too careful not to confound what may be the effect of chance or *idle amusement* with letters or syllabic characters.” Mr. Trutio relates, that in the southern extremity of Africa, among the Beljuanas, he saw children busy in tracing on a rock with some sharp instrument characters which bore the most perfect resemblance with the P and the M of the Roman alphabet, notwithstanding which these rude tribes were perfectly ignorant of writing.

Sir James Simpson's note, at page 107 of his work, corroborates this view:—“Three years ago, my friend Dr. Arthur Mitchell saw the herring fishermen, *in a day of idleness*, cutting circles with their knives on the face of the rock without the operators being able to assign any reason for their work, except that others had done it before them.”

Carvings occur also on the cromlechs lately discovered in the north of Africa, near Constantine. At first they were thought to be designs or characters; but a more careful examination led to the conviction that they were lines traced by *the Arab shepherds* with the point of a stone or knife.

Several of the walls of Pompeii and of the Guard-room of the Pretorian Cohort, on the Palatine Hill at Rome, are covered with rude scratchings (graffiti) and writings; and at the present day the same fashion continues on public walls and in more retired places—all proceeding from the same spirit of idleness. The love of fiddling and of doing something in idle moments is natural to man in all ages and climes.

Man, indeed, is the same in all climes, and is instinctively led to do the same thing in the same way under similar circumstances in regions widest apart. As Humboldt remarks—"Nations of very different descent, when in *a similar uncivilized state*, having the same disposition to simplify and generalize outlines, and, being impelled by inherent mental disposition, may be led to *produce similar signs and symbols*."

Hence we find identical forms in the carvings and sculpturings in countries the most remote from one another.

Identical circles, with crosses within them, are found carved on the cromlechs of Scandinavia, on blocks forming an interior chamber of a tumulus at Dowth, and on the rocks near Veraguas, in America.

These rude carvings cannot be considered as ornamentation, as their total want of symmetrical arrangement, and the absence of continuity in their repetition, preclude this.

Some of these traced figures may, however, be like the "*bo märke*" of the Scandinavians, private marks of property adopted by the Scandinavian peasants, or like the "*totem*" of the Red Indian, the mark of his nation and of the individual. Carving, then, in idle moments is as natural to the savage or rude nature of Scandinavia as to the idler of the present day, who carves his initials or monogram on a tree or bench.

Sir James Simpson has shown that most of these carvings belong to the Stone age, which was synchronous with the pastoral phase of civilization. Some of a ruder description may belong to an earlier age, or the hunting phase.